“COVID-19, Gender and Human Rights”

Raoul Wallenberg Institute (virtual), Lund (Sweden), 28 August 2020

Introduction

“COVID-19, Gender and Human Rights” is a virtual gathering initiative spearheaded by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (RWI). The RWI, in collaboration with partners and researchers from Belarus, Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, Turkey and Zimbabwe, has recently launched a research initiative to analyze COVID-19’s gendered impacts on human rights.

This webinar aims to provide critical insights into the effects of the pandemic on women’s rights and discuss what should be done to better respond to gender inequalities and increased gender-based violence (GBV) and intersectional discrimination suffered by women in the context of COVID-19.

List of Panelists

**Moderator:** Şebnem Keniş, RWI’s Senior Policy Advisor on gender and human rights

**Speakers:**
- Hilary Gbedemah, Chair of the CEDAW Committee, Ghana
- Meskerem Geset Techane, Member and Former Chair of the UN working group on Discrimination against Women and Girls, Ethiopia
- Cai Yiping, Executive committee member, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), China
- Morten Kjaerum, Director of the RWI, Sweden

First panel

The first panel focuses on how women are most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. What are the gender impacts on the pandemic from an international human rights perspective? How has COVID-19 crisis deepened gender inequalities and intersectional discrimination?

- The pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities and has affected all level of sections (health, employment, family rights).
- The isolation has increased GBV and other forms of violence due to lockdown. Women are forced to live with their abusers and restrictions of movement have made it very difficult to report it.
- The support systems are overwhelmed due to COVID-19 where some shelters have shutdown or have reduced their services because of the fear of infection.
- States resources are more focused on the health sector and not on violence or health related to violence.
- Women could not have access to justice to report GBV or other forms of violence.
- Regarding the education, women are more represented in the educational system as teachers, receptionists, canteen managers. They are more exposed and impacted because they tend to provide care services.
- Girls are excluded from school due to lockdown and they are more involve in household and family chores than boys. They have therefore less time to study and less access to technology. In the post-COVID period, States and organizations must verify if girls are back to school in the same rate as they were before.
- The pandemic has increased risks of child marriage and adolescent’s pregnancy.
- The lockdown has affected women domestic workers where they spend more than 14 hours a day in care and domestic work, without sometimes being paid.
- Women are over-represented in the informal sector with lack of social protection.

Second Panel

The second panel tackles the issue on how the world might have looked different if human rights protections have been implemented before the pandemic. How can human rights protection guide the States in their COVID-19 response and recovery efforts?
- **Hilary Gbedemah** issued the importance to create a **guideline notes** on COVID-19 to the States in order to protect women and girls from GBV and to provide sexual and reproductive health.

- States should take a closer look at migrant women, domestic workers, women with disabilities, women in poverty, women refugees, women in detention, LBGT+ and women in humanitarian settings.

- **Hilary Gbedemah** stressed the necessity to **strengthen the institutional response** and to involve women in the decision-making process

**Third panel**

The third panel highlights **panelists recommendations**. How can we **ensure human rights protection** in the COVID-19 response and the recovery efforts? What should be done looking forward?

- States should recognize the fact that **crisis affects women**.

- To look forward, States, institutions and people should **promote the participation** of women at all level of decision-making.

- It is necessary to ensure the **continuing health services** who were partly shutdown during lockdown.

- It is important to ensure **economic alternatives** for women who are facing the economic burden due to lockdown.

- States and institutions should **construct a dialogue** and look how the pandemic has affected each individual country and women.

- It is essential to **make justice more accessible** to women, especially the most vulnerable in order to curb GBV.